

SERMON FOR MARCH 23, 2014

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i
United Church of Christ

Third Sunday in Lent

7:45 & 10:30 Worship Services

Scripture: Exodus 17:1-7; **John 4:5-42**

Message: **"Lent 3: GOD Provides Us Living
Water To Share the Good News!"**

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Gathering in the Word

Today is the 3rd Sunday in Lent!

For all of us people of faith—we need ***living waters***. We need spiritual and relational resources that refresh and transform our lives. GOD is willing to give us what we need for spiritual transformation in these challenging times; we need to open the doors to GOD's care—trusting that GOD will supply our greatest needs. There are no absolute guarantees of a cure for every ailment and sickness, ***but there is always refreshing living waters from GOD that enables us to respond with grace that goes beyond our power and to summon the reserves for a "second wind" in facing all those difficult but fixable challenges every day!***

So what are the LIVING WATERS of GOD?

Hearing the Word

Our first lesson is Exodus 17:1-7:

Exodus 17:1-7 (The VOICE Bible)

17 The entire community of Israel traveled in stages out of the desert of Sin, just as the Eternal instructed. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there to quench their thirst. ² *Once again* the people complained to Moses.

Israelites: Give us water to drink! *We're thirsty.*

Moses: Why do you aim your complaints at me? Why are you testing the Eternal One?

³ But the people were so thirsty for water; they complained to Moses *and leveled accusations against him*.

Israelites: Why did you lead us out of Egypt? Was it to kill *all of us*—our children and livestock included—with this thirst?

⁴ Moses *had had enough of their complaints, so he* cried out to the Eternal One.

Moses: What am I supposed to do with these people *and their relentless complaining*? They are on the verge of stoning me.

Eternal One (to Moses): ⁵ *Here's what I want you to do: go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you. Also, be sure to bring your shepherd's staff—the one with which you struck the Nile.* ⁶ I will be there when you arrive standing at the rock of Horeb. I want you to strike the rock *with your staff; and when you do, water will flow out of it so that everyone will have enough to drink.*

The elders of Israel *accompanied Moses and* watched as he did what the Eternal directed.

⁷ Moses named the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites complained and tested the Eternal, saying, "Is He standing with us or not?"

For us many today the **Law** looks like a set of grim and harsh duties as well as a pack of reminders of how lousy and worthless we are! **After GOD's aloha comes to us**

in Jesus—we now come to see in the Law a joyful opportunity to live in exactly the way we were created to live!

Exodus 17 has something for us to help us understand GOD's Law. We are familiar with this story of the people of Israel getting hot and thirsty as they are trekking to the desert (for 40 years of trekking!) and their complaining to Moses about not enough water.

Horeb is the mountain of GOD:

- ✓ Where GOD revealed GOD's self in the burning bush!
- ✓ The mountain where the 10 Commandments were given to Moses!
- ✓ Horeb is also the place where grumbling and testing took place!

GOD causes streams of water to flow in the desert—not only proving GOD's presence with them but preserving their lives as well! GOD's Law also “flows” out from Horeb and is a sign that GOD is among and with GOD's people! This means that all things being equal—the people will be able to see that in the Law a blessing that is every bit as much about bringing and preserving true life as are the streams of water in the desert place!

- ✓ **Water and the Law give life!**
- ✓ **Water shows GOD's aloha, the Law shows GOD's aloha!**
- ✓ **Both are signs of GOD's presence and blessing!**

Ah---but the Israelites didn't see it that way!

Ah---even we today don't see it that way as well!

So for Israel—when GOD told them how life works as reflected in GOD’s Laws of Do’s and Don’ts—GOD was trying to protect them from the harm that could come were they ignorant of life’s pitfalls and dangers—but—this aspect of the Law is something many of us forget about! **When GOD lays down some universal absolute—it is a reflection of the way things are, the way the world works—and that’s a good thing for us to know! And if the Lord GOD takes the time to let us know about that—then it is finally a loving and life-giving thing GOD does—just possibly as loving and life-preserving streams of water in the desert! Our Second Reading is from John 4:5-42:**

John 4:5-42 (The VOICE Bible)

For Jews in Israel, Samaria is a place to be avoided. Before Solomon’s death 1,000 years earlier, the regions of Samaria and Judea were part of a united Israel. After the rebellion that divided the kingdom, Samaria became a hotbed of idol worship. The northern kings made alliances that corrupted the people by introducing foreign customs and strange gods. They even had the nerve to build a temple to the True God on Mt. Gerizim to rival the one in Jerusalem. By the time the twelve are traveling with Jesus, it has long been evident that the Samaritans have lost their way. By marrying outsiders, they have polluted the land. Israel’s Jews consider them to be half-breeds—mongrels—and the Jews know to watch out for them or else be bitten by temptation.

⁵⁻⁸ In a *small* Samaritan town known as Sychar, Jesus *and His entourage* stopped to rest at the historic well that Jacob gave his son Joseph. It was about noon when Jesus found a spot to sit close to the well while the disciples ventured off to find provisions. *From His vantage, He watched as* a Samaritan woman approached to draw some water. *Unexpectedly* He spoke to her.

Jesus: Would you *draw water, and* give me a drink?

Woman: ⁹ I cannot believe that you, a Jew, would associate with me, a Samaritan woman; much less ask me to give you a drink.

Jews, you see, have no dealings with Samaritans. Also, a man never approaches a woman like this in public. Jesus is breaking accepted social barriers with this confrontation.

Jesus: ¹⁰ You don't know the gift of God or who is asking you for a drink *of this water from Jacob's well*. Because if you did, you would have asked him *for something greater*; and he would have given you the living water.

Woman: ¹¹ Sir, You sit by this deep well *a thirsty man* without a bucket in sight. Where does this living water come from? ¹² Are you claiming superiority to our father Jacob who labored long and hard to dig *and maintain* this well so that he could share clean water with his sons, *grandchildren, and cattle*?

Jesus: ¹³ Drink this water, and your thirst is quenched only for a moment. *You must return to this well again and again.* ¹⁴ I offer water that will become a wellspring

within you that gives life throughout eternity. You will never be thirsty again.

Woman: ¹⁵ *Please, Sir, give me some of this water, so I'll never be thirsty and never again have to make the trip to this well.*

Jesus: ¹⁶ Then bring your husband to Me.

Woman: ¹⁷⁻¹⁸ I do not have a husband.

Jesus: Technically you are telling the truth. But you have had five husbands and are currently living with a man you are not married to.

Woman: ¹⁹ Sir, it is obvious to me that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped here on this mountain, but your people say that Jerusalem is the only place for all to worship. *Which is it?*

Jesus: ²¹⁻²⁴ Woman, I tell you that neither *is so*. Believe this: a new day is coming—in fact, it's already here—when the importance will not be placed on the time and place of worship but on the truthful hearts of worshipers. You worship what you don't know while we worship what we do know, for God's salvation is coming through the Jews. The Father is spirit, and he is seeking followers whose worship is sourced in truth and deeply spiritual as well. Regardless of whether you are in Jerusalem or on this mountain, if you do not seek the Father, then you do not worship.

Woman: ²⁵ These mysteries will be made clear by he who is promised, the Anointed One.

Jesus: ²⁶ The Anointed is speaking to you. I am the One you have been looking for.

²⁷ The disciples returned to Him *and gathered around him* in amazement that he would *openly break their customs* by speaking to this woman, but none of them would ask him what he was looking for or why he was speaking with her. ²⁸ The woman went back to the town, leaving her water pot behind. She stopped men and women on the streets and told them about what had happened.

Woman: ²⁹ *I met* a stranger who knew everything about me. Come and see for yourselves; can he be the Anointed One?

³⁰ A crowd came out of the city and approached Jesus.

³¹ During all of this, the disciples were urging Jesus to eat the food they gathered.

Jesus: ³² I have food to eat that you know nothing about.

Disciples (to one another): ³³ Is it possible someone else has brought him food while we were away?

Jesus: ³⁴ I receive my nourishment by serving the will of the Father who sent me and completing His work. ³⁵ You have heard others say, "*Be patient*; we have four more months to wait until the crops are ready for the harvest." I say, take a closer look and you will see that the fields are ripe and ready for the harvest. ³⁶ The harvester is collecting his pay, harvesting fruit ripe for eternal life. So even now, he and the sower are celebrating *their fortune*. ³⁷ The saying *may be old, but it is true*: "One person sows, and another reaps." ³⁸ I sent you to harvest where you have not labored; someone else took the time to

plant and cultivate, and you feast on the fruit of their labor.

³⁹ Meanwhile, because one woman shared with her neighbors how Jesus exposed her past and present, the village of *Sychar* was transformed—many Samaritans heard and believed. ⁴⁰ The Samaritans approached Jesus and repeatedly invited him to stay with them, so he lingered there for two days *on their account*. ⁴¹ With the words that came from his mouth, there were many more believing Samaritans. ⁴² They began their faith journey because of the testimony of the woman *beside the well*; but when they heard for themselves, they were convinced the one they were hearing was and is God's Anointed, *the Liberating King*, sent to rescue the entire world.

The village well in John 4 was a place where everyone gathered two times a day and where they lingered and hung out to talk story and catch up on the news of gossip. But this Samaritan woman in our story didn't go to the well at those times. People treated her badly and called her a sleazy, sinful woman. But also remember—that in those days women had almost zero social standing! All a husband had to do was haul his wife out into the street and then say to her three times, "I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you" and that was that! Women didn't have much to say in those times!

So Jesus comes to the well at and talks to this Samaritan woman. She knows theology and was aware of the promised Messiah as well as the controversy between the

Jews and the Samaritans about where GOD may or may not be appropriately worshiped. This town had already wrote her off as *a bad sort of person*—but inside her—beats the heart of someone thirsty for GOD!

So Jesus asks for water to drink breaking the rules! And the disciples are witnessing this scandal take place before their eyes! The rules said:

"A man shall not talk with a woman in the street, not every with his own wife, on account of what others may say. He that talks with such a woman brings evil on himself. If any man gives a woman knowledge of GOD's lay, it is as they he had taught her lechery."

Jesus not only speaks to the woman but speaks the words of life to her! Jesus uses the well as an occasion to introduce the memorable image of ***living water***—a new spring of water that would well and bubble up into all eternity. Needless to say—this woman wants to buy stock in the company that produces this wonderful *living water*.

"OK," Jesus says, "but let's bring your husband into the deal, too." Why would Jesus say this? To shame her? No—but probably as a reminder to her that she had been trying to quench and satisfy her thirst in all the wrong ways.

Eventually she catches on to what Jesus is saying. She races back to the village and began knocking on the doors whose doorsteps she had not darkened in years! Somehow she forgot that she was to avoid these folks! Instead—she rather quickly—became a member of the community again! Before this story ends—the villagers

are actually *speaking* to her again—and speaking gratefully at that!

**This is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!
Thanks be to GOD!**

Doing the Word

So on this Third Sunday in Lent, what is the Word of God for us?

**1. ONE: NO MATTER WHO YOU/WE ARE,
JESUS IS THE COSMIC WORD MADE FLESH
WHO ALONE CAN GIVE TO YOU/US WHAT
WE NEED!**

- ✓ Jesus alone does this!
- ✓ Embrace Jesus if you haven't already done so!
- ✓ If you already have – remind ourselves again and others as well!

**2.TWO: THE WATERS OF LIFE WILL NEVER RUN
DRY!**

- ✓ These waters come from the Holy Spirit moving through our spirit!
- ✓ These waters can refresh, rejuvenate, energize and revitalize us regardless of where we've been on life's journey!
- ✓ Jesus in nurtured – and nurtures – through living waters and the bread of life!

**3.THREE: WHEN WE OPEN THE DOOR TO GOD'S
VISION—NEW AND CREATIVE ENERGIES
SUSTAIN US FOR THE PILGRIMAGE AHEAD AND
EXPANDS OUR OWN VISION TO INCLUDE**

STRANGERS AND PERSONS OUTSIDE OUR SPIRITUAL, ETHNIC, AND CULTURAL CIRCLES!

- ✓ TFCCCH is one of those places where we learn, we practice, we make our mistakes, and we forgive one another and ourselves!
- ✓ TFCCCH is a community where we are to invite an open ourselves to our neighbors and our neighborhoods!
- ✓ Even though we are TFCCCH we are always open to other peoples of all races and ethnicities!

Sent in the Word

We need revival: though, perhaps, not the old-fashioned alter call, revivals of olden days, and the hell-fire and brimstone preaching. We need another kind of revival—awakening us to GOD's call to personal, congregational, and social transformation.

We have been thirsty too long; we are parched and tempted to live by scarcity when GOD's abundance is all around. We need to believe that we can be refreshed and that we have the tools to transform our lives and our Church through opening to GOD's grace. Everlasting life and spiritual refreshment is in the here and now—awaiting our announcement, affirmation, and appropriation!

